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ABSTRACT

In addition to presenting a brief picture of the public school administrator on an Indian reservation, this digest identifies some issues and problems, suggests ways for administrators to deal with those problems, and provides possible resources which can be of assistance. After citing public school enrollment at 176,000 Indian students attending 800 public schools on or near reservations, special challenges faced by the administrator are described. Some challenges include the additional responsibilities of working on or near reservations, isolation of some communities, staffing problems due to isolation, community interaction and communication, integration of language and cultural education into the regular curriculum, understanding the impact of federal policy, and understanding tribal policy. Educational standards, funding, public relations, staffing, and student attendance are identified as major issues. Recomendations emphasize analyzing these issues from educational, economic, political, and cultural perspectives. Special resources available are cited including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of Education, national organizations, journals, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, and the Bilingual Clearinghouse. (PM)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

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PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION ON INDIAN RESERVATIONS

Among the most challenging responsibilities in education are those of the school administrator. The job becomes even more complex and difficult for a public school administrator on or near an Indian reservation. Such an administrator is not only expected to be effective in public school management, but also to be knowledgeable about the local tribal culture. In addition, the impact of the tribal-state-federal government relationship on the school district is of constant concern. This digest will present a brief picture of the public school administrator on an Indian reservation, identify some issues and problems, and suggest ways for administrators to deal with them. Possible resources are also included to assist the administrator in securing assistance.

How does the enrollment of Indian students in public schools compare to their enrollment in other schools?

Roughly four times as many Indian students attend public schools as participate in any other type of school system. According to the FY 1985 Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) budget, there are 176,000 students attending 800 public schools on or near reservations. This figure can be compared to 33,515 students attending 206 BIA schools, and 9,020 students attending 62 contract schools.

What special challenges does a public school administrator on an Indian reservation face?

As in any other location, the administrator of a reservation school is expected to be knowledgeable in all areas of school management. These include administrative theory and practice, fiscal management, personnel management, pupil personnel, educational curriculum and instruction, human relations, school politics, and community relations. Of course, added to this special expertise are skills in planning, organization, and decision making. The reservation setting, however, along with community and tribal contact, can make these expectations different from those for administrators in other areas.

Critical factors are the size and location of the reservation. Whether it is small or large, urban or rural, it presents a unique set of circumstances with which a school administrator must deal effectively.

Some reservation communities are small, making the administrator highly visible, a community leader who is never completely away from the job. Often the administrator lives in a school compound, interacting with the same people on and off the job. It is likely that school-related business will take place anywhere in the community. These communities are often isolated at great distances from major urban areas. This often means the administrator must travel great distances to meet with tribal, state, or national officials or to attend conferences and other professional meetings. Isolation can also mean that the administrator may have difficulty in recruiting and hiring qualified teachers, counselors, and other professional staff. It is difficult for an administrator to provide staff development activities or degree programs when universities and resources are costly or logistically difficult to arrange.

Other reservation communities are larger or perhaps located near Urban areas. Here the administrator becomes less visible to the community members and may even live in an urban setting. By not living in the community, the administrator may not appear to be involved in local or tribal affairs. This administrator faces the challenge of establishing and maintaining effective communication and meaningful contact with a community of which he is not an inhabitant. The danger of community rejection may be heightened under these circumstances.

The administrator is expected to know how the federal government impacts on all aspects of public education. However, there is a special relationship between Indian tribes and the federal government, based on treaties, executive orders, and court decisions. It is especially important that the administrator understand the various federal policies, legislation, and programs that provide funding to Indian students. Among these are Impact Aid (P.L. 81-874), Education Amendments of 1978 (P.L. 95-561), the Johnson-O'Malley Act, and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (P.L. 93-638).

Also, the administrator is expected to know tribal educational policy and practice and how it influences public school education. The administrator is then expected to blend federal government and tribal expectations with state requirements to develop and implement a quality educational program that meets the required standards for certification and accreditation.

If the local community and tribe support bilingual and bicultural education, then one of the educational challenges of an administrator is to integrate the local tribal language and culture into the regular curriculum of the school. Relevant curriculum materials and teaching methods must be identified or developed. This usually means that some form of biligual-bicultural education is used to promote basic skill development.

The administrator often serves as the link between the school, the community and the tribe. This role is especially difficult and delicate; it requires political as well as human relations skills. Conflict among members of the community, members of the school board, parents, students and/or school personnel can be destructive. Resolving such conflict often demands decisions which are politically or culturally based and which may seem to be illogical. It may, therefore, be hard for an administrator to prove these decisions to be educationally sound.

Achieving effectiveness in school administration under these circumstances may depend on the background and ethnicity of the administrator. It can make a difference whether the individual is an Indian or non-Indian; if Indian, the administrator's tribal affiliation may affect his ability to perform successfully. Cultural factors and local expectations can make it difficult for a local person to be an effective administrator.

What are some of the major issues and problems?

The major issues and problems facing public school administrators on Indian reservations encompass educational standards, funding, public relations, staffing, and student attendance as well as a number of other areas.

Providing high-quality education while complying with state, federal, and tribal standards becomes increasingly difficult under conditions of limited population that may be bilingual and bicultural. It is critical for the administrator to know how to integrate supplemental programs such as the Title IV Indian Education Act and the Title VII Bilingual Education Act into the regular school program. Identifying and using, as well as accounting for, funds to operate the school district are complicated because

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reservation public schools are often faced with high-cost items combined with limited local tax resources. Obtaining school construction monies is also especially difficult.

It is increasingly important to establish and sustain meaningful parent and community involvement, especially in supplemental programs that require parent committees. In addition, good personal contact is needed to understand student absenteeism and withdrawal or dropping out as well as the individual personal and family situations which affect the student's school life.

The administrator must pay special attention to recruiting and retaining quality staff members in particular bilingual and bicultural teachers and counselors. Isolation, salary, housing, social life, educational opportunities for children, employment for spouse, and indifference to teaching Indian students often lead to high employee turn-over. A related aspect is the need for staff development programs. Often it is necessary to make teachers, counselors and other professional staff aware of the local language and culture through in-service training.

How can public school administrators deal with the issues and problems?

There is no easy way to deal with these and other issues and problems. One way an administrator can address issues and problems is to follow a decision-making process that insures relevant information is identified and obtained. In addition to normal administrative concerns, the effect of the local Indian culture and tribal government on education should be determined. Also, it is necessary to identify special educational needs of Indian students that may affect decisions in all areas.

Once information is obtained, it should be analyzed from educational, economic, political, and cultural perspectives. Once the administrator or the school board makes a decision, it should be disseminated to those affected by it. A brief explanation as to how and why the decision was arrived at often proves worthwhile and may avoid conflict.

Keep in mind that Indian people are sensitive to the policy of self-determination, which includes involvement of Indian people in the decision-making process. An administrator may have to attend tribal community meetings or tribal council sessions to gather information or to address issues. Often it is helpful if the administrator is fluent in the tribal language or uses an interpreter.

What special resources are available?

Fortunately, the public school administrator for educating students from an Indian reservation can secure help from several sources.

Contact with special programs or individuals within the school district should be made. Often there are individuals who are knowledgeable about local tribal history as well as cultural, community history. Indian education staff are especially helpful in planning and implementing bilingual-bicultural education, in meeting Indian students' needs, and in understanding related federal programs. Similiar resources can be tapped from other public school districts on or near the reservation and from BIA or contract schools. An important part of the community the school district serves is the tribal council or an education department or unit in the tribal government. Members of these groups can be valuable sources of input into the school administrator's information bank.

Outside the school district and local community are other agencies and institutions which can help. The state department of education may have an Indian education component, unit, or resource person. Also, universities and colleges often have Indian studies programs, Indian education programs, bilingual-bicultural programs, or individual staff with knowledge and experience in Indian education.

The federal government itself is a source, especially the BIA or programs administered by the Department of Education (ED) under the Title IV Indian Education Act or the Title VII Bilingual Education Act. The BIA and ED also fund regional centers that provide local school districts with technical assistance in educational areas.

The administrator can look to state and national professional organizations that promote administrative, school board, and teacher concerns. National organizations, like the Council for Exceptional Children or the National Education Association, have Indian components or Indian special interest groups. Many of these organizations have annual conferences or local meetings where special concerns are addressed. There are also state and national Indian organizations that promote Indian education. Many states have Indian education associations or groups addressing specific issues. The National Indian Education Association, National Congress of American Indians, National Tribal Chairman's Association, National Advisory Council on Indian Education, National Indian Child Conference, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium are examples of national organizations that can serve as resources for schools.

Written materials prove a valuable resource to the committed public school administrator. There are publications and other information sources that can provide research findings, descriptions of current practice, or history and cultural information, all related to the Indian reservation or setting. The *Journal of Indian Education* is published at Arizona State University and materials from the presses at the University of Oklahoma and the University of New Mexico are excellent sources of information. Other professional publications or periodicals address Indian concerns or at times have special issues devoted to the education of Indian students. The fall of 1983 issue of the *Peabody Journal of Education* is a good example.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools at New Mexico State University and the Bilingual Clearinghouse in Rosslyn, Virginia, are examples of data and information sources that provide current information on the practice of Indian education and bilingual education.

A sensitive commitment to the special needs of this educational environment, establishment of community/tribal rapport, and knowledge and application of information and guidance as well as funding resources will assist the public school administrator in meeting the needs of the Indian reservation he serves.

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